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# THE ROUND TABLE

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## PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Personal expression is a course of training which recognizes the importance and universal application of the ordinary personal relations among individuals, and it undertakes to develop facility and efficiency in these relations.

Its claim as a subject for study in the schools is based on the following premises:

1. That human relations in the bulk are of the personal, individual kind.
2. That social efficiency, business efficiency, the pleasures and successes of life, are all bound up in the ability to approach others cleverly and to engage them in intelligent conversation.
3. That tact, good address and good manners, and a pleasing, forceful personality are real touchstones to success.

If training in this field of personal qualities is feasible, it will yield richer returns than we realize from many subjects in our present-day courses of study.

Many of our pupils, even some of the brighter ones, show surprising incapacity in all the ordinary social and business relations. Personality seems to be almost a negative quantity, and conversation indeed the lost art. The reason is not far to seek. While our high-school students devote a few hundred hours of well-directed study to their history or mathematics, they give practically no time or thought, either in the home or in the school, to those personal characteristics which so directly and vitally determine one's standing and success.

What better can one learn than those things which help him to get on successfully with his fellows? "It is not so much a question of what a man knows as what use he can make of what he knows." The world appraises our young people only at what they can say and do in their business and social relations.

Can the school give the specific training which will develop personal characteristics to the point where the powers of our pupils, both native and acquired, will become more dynamic? Can good address and good manners, poise, initiative, tact, personality, and conversational ability become the subjects of successful study and instruction? If so, the

schools have a new field in which to operate, for the need of development in this direction is urgent, and the value to accrue therefrom correspondingly great. In every capacity of life good personal qualities go at their face value.

The Springfield, Missouri, high school began an experiment five months ago to determine the extent to which personal characteristics can be developed. There was faith from the outset that the experiment would prove successful, but the extent to which the course might appeal to pupils and yield them profit was not even suspected. The rather exceptional interest shown at first by the pupils was attributed largely to the novelty of the exercises, but after an interval of five months the pupils both by word and by act show increased devotion to the new subject. As to resulting benefits, the pupils, parents, and teachers in charge are satisfied beyond their expectations.

The agencies through which the results are achieved are the following:

1. A limited number of instruction lessons to impress the importance of good personality and conversational ability, to discover the things necessary to their development, and to forestall difficulties.
2. A large amount of laboratory work in the form of group conversations to lead the pupils out into the form of expression which they will have constant occasion to use throughout their lives, and to give them facility in it.
3. The employment of many projects through which the pupils will acquire initiative, poise, good address and good manners, personal "kemptness," tact, and good judgment.
4. Field work, or the out-of-school activities where the pupils apply their conversational and other acquisitions.
5. A study of the personality and conversation of others.
6. A study of the best literature on these subjects.
7. Talks to the pupils by those who have special equipment in the field covered by this subject.

Our experiment is conducted in connection with one section of the Junior English class. For the conversation work the pupils are arranged in groups of five each, the groups being changed once in the course of each lesson, and changed for each succeeding lesson. The class meets Monday and Thursday of each week.

The groups discuss in the ordinary conversational way some topic of social, civic, or other value; for example, "The Service to the Country Rendered by Buffalo Bill and Other Pioneers." For a subject of this character the pupils are given a few days for preparation. At other

times a topic is assigned for extempore discussion, and an occasional topic is assigned for light conversation.

For one of the projects, each pupil was asked to make a new acquaintance and to report on the manner of doing it. For another, each pupil held an interview with a business man and reported results.

In the field work the pupil embraces many opportunities to put into practice his conversational and other abilities. In other words, he takes his laboratory with him into everyday affairs.

Please do not confuse personal expression with oral composition. In a class of thirty in personal expression six pupils, one in each group, will be talking at one time in the usual conversational way. The group plan makes the two fundamentally different. In personal expression interplay among the group members and team work are leading features rather than the individual presentation of a topic under more formal conditions. The range of topics is also different and much less formal. Oral theme-work is public speaking; personal expression, private speaking. The latter creates a social atmosphere, giving pupils exceptional opportunity to get acquainted, and through sympathetic group-relations extends a helping hand to the timid pupil. Its projects and field work bring the pupil into intimate contact with those outside the school. Oral composition has no such claim to present.

So brief a discussion of a new subject must be more suggestive than instructive. The pupils in personal expression find a motive in the benefits they see ahead in the business and social worlds. They give natural expression to themselves and develop just as pupils do in other fields where interest and motive are dominant factors.

The parents who are represented in our experimental class indorse the work in strong terms. Visiting teachers (there have been many) have left with a single purpose—namely, to see classes in personal expression introduced into their own schools.

No pupil in the experiment class is a doubting Thomas as to the pleasure or profit he derives from this new line of work.

E. E. DODD

SPRINGFIELD, MO.

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### THE NINE RELATIONSHIPS

My little brother is learning the nine relationships of compound conjunctions. These are:

a) *Addition*.—One thought may be added to another. Example: "I went to the theater, and there I saw Richard Mansfield."